



Fight The Bite

The First Line Of Defense

West Nile Virus and West Nile Encephalitis Frequently Asked Questions

Q: *What is West Nile virus (WNV)?*

West Nile virus (WNV) is a virus that is spread by infected mosquitoes.

Q: *Can the virus be transmitted from person-to-person?*

No, the virus cannot be spread from person-to-person.

Transmission is known to occur only through the bite of an infected mosquito. Birds do not transmit West Nile virus to people, but people should wear gloves when handling any dead bird or mammal.

Q: *Is West Nile virus in Mississippi?*

Yes. West Nile virus has now been found in Mississippi in horses, birds, mosquitoes, and humans.

Q: *How concerned should I be about West Nile Virus?*

WNV is uncommon, but you should take precautions to prevent mosquito bites. Less than 1% of mosquitoes carry the virus in an infected area. Most persons who get the virus never become ill, about 15% develop flu-like illness (fever, headache, chills, muscle aches, and possibly rash or swollen lymph nodes), and less than 1% will develop meningitis or encephalitis.

Q: *If I live in an area where birds or mosquitoes with West Nile virus have been reported and a mosquito bites me, am I likely to get sick?*

No. Even in areas where mosquitoes do carry the virus, very few mosquitoes—much less than 1%—are infected. If the mosquito is infected, less than 1% of people who get bitten and become infected will get severely ill.

Q: *What symptoms might I have if I am infected with West Nile virus?*

- Symptoms usually occur 3-15 days after the bite of an infected mosquito.
- Most people who are infected with WNV will have no symptoms or a mild flu-like illness with a fever, headache, body aches, and possibly rash or swollen lymph nodes. In some individuals, particularly the elderly, the virus can cause a serious illness called *encephalitis*, which is an inflammation of the brain.
- Symptoms of encephalitis can include high fever, severe headache, nausea, stiff neck, confusion, muscle weakness, paralysis, disorientation, convulsions, coma, and rarely, death.
- Less than 1% of humans infected with West Nile virus will develop serious illness.
- If you have any concerns about your health, you should contact your health care provider.

Q: *Is a woman's pregnancy at risk if she gets West Nile encephalitis?*

No. No documented evidence shows that a pregnancy is at risk due to infection with West Nile virus.

Q: *I think I have the symptoms of West Nile virus. What should I do?*

Contact your health care provider if you have concerns about your health.

Q: *Is there a treatment for West Nile virus?*

No drug is available to treat WNV. Treatment consists of supportive care. Most people who get ill will recover.

Q: *Besides mosquitoes, can you get West Nile virus directly from other insects or ticks?*

Not in the United States. Infected mosquitoes are the primary source for West Nile virus.

Q: *A mosquito bit me (or a member of my family). What should I do? Should I be tested for West Nile virus or other mosquito-borne diseases?*

No, unless you become very ill, testing for WNV is not necessary.

Q: *Is there a vaccine for West Nile virus?*

No vaccine exists to protect humans against West Nile virus infection
A vaccine for horses is available. Contact your veterinarian for more information.

Q: *If West Nile virus is detected in my county/town/neighborhood, should I stay indoors?*

No. But you should always protect yourself. The risks of acquiring a mosquito-borne disease are low. Staying indoors is not necessary except at peak mosquito biting times (dawn and dusk).

Q: *What can I do to reduce my risk of becoming infected with West Nile virus?*

- Stay indoors at peak mosquito biting times – dawn, dusk, and in the early evening.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants whenever you are outdoors during peak times.
- Spray clothing with repellents containing permethrin or DEET since mosquitoes can bite through thin clothing.
- Apply insect repellent sparingly to exposed skin. An effective repellent will contain 35% DEET.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends using 10% DEET on children.

Repellents can irritate the eyes and mouth, so avoid applying repellent to the hands of children.

Be sure to read and follow the manufacturer's DIRECTIONS FOR USE, as printed on the product.

Note: Vitamin B and “ultrasonic” devices are NOT effective in preventing mosquito bites

Q: *I have seen dead birds. Should I report them?*

Yes. See reporting and submitting information.

Q: *Will the dead birds in my area make my family or me sick?*

No. WNV cannot be transmitted from dead birds to people or other animals. WNV is transmitted only through the bite of an infected mosquito.

Q: *What animals other than birds can get sick from West Nile virus?*

Do I have to worry that my pets or livestock will get West Nile virus?

Only *some* horses and birds seem to get sick with WNV. Animals such as cats and dogs **will not become ill or die**. Pet birds taken outside should be protected with screens.

Q: *Do I have to worry that my poultry (chickens, turkeys)*

will get West Nile virus? Should I continue to eat their eggs?

Most chickens and turkeys that are infected with West Nile virus will not become ill or die. Some exotic breeds of poultry can die if infected. You may continue to eat your chickens' eggs.

Q: *Can infected animals be carriers for West Nile virus and transmit the virus to humans or other animals?*

No. West Nile virus is transmitted by infected mosquitoes.

No evidence exists of person-to-person, animal-to-animal, or animal-to-person transmission of West Nile virus.

Q: *What can I do to protect my horse or pet from West Nile virus?*

Horses can be vaccinated for WNV. Contact your veterinarian for information on the vaccine or visit the Mississippi Board of Animal Health website at www.mbah.state.ms.us. Limit your animals' exposure to mosquitoes.

Q: *Whom should I contact for more information?*

Call 1-877-978-6453, or visit the Mississippi State Department Of Health website at www.msdh.state.ms.us.

Other sources follow:

- Mississippi Board of Animal Health website at www.mbah.state.ms.us.
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm>.
- For information about the use of insect repellents containing DEET or pesticides to control mosquitoes, visit the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) website at <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/factsheets/skeeters.htm>.

For maps of the current distribution of West Nile virus in the United States, visit the National Atlas website at http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/research/west_nile/west_nile.html

***Note:** When West Nile virus or any other mosquito-borne disease is detected in Mississippi, press releases will be issued and public education will be provided to increase awareness of personal protective measures to prevent mosquito exposure. Your county may also begin other control measures to reduce the number of larval and/or adult mosquitoes.*

Division Of Epidemiology
1-877-978-6453



MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH